

General McClellan's Removal From Command

by Harry H. Ricker III

Introduction

On November 7, 1862, while poised for a long awaited opportunity to engage the Army of Northern Virginia, General McClellan was dismissed from the command of the Army of The Potomac.¹ However, since McClellan was never authorized to take field command of that army, this decision was neither unexpected or surprising. We will see in this paper that following the battle of Antietam, the political conflict between McClellan's war strategy, and the war strategy of Lincoln administration reached its crisis and became resolved in McClellan's removal. This action ended a long standing dissatisfaction with McClellan's performance, which included one previous failed attempt to remove him, but without someone to replace McClellan, Lincoln had delayed replacing him.

The most curious aspect of this incident, is that while Lincoln had very many opportunities to remove McClellan, why he did this at the time when McClellan was engaged in an active campaign poised to do the battle, which Lincoln had long desired and hoped for, is a mystery that deserves a careful and searching analysis. There are many historical theories about this and we will examine them in the course of the discussion. What is of particular concern is not that McClellan was relieved of command, that object had been in Lincoln's plans for many months, but that this action should occur on the eve of a potentially important decisive victory for the Union cause.

What is also curious about this particular incident is that having developed a detailed plan for McClellan's removal, since March of 1862, it is a puzzle why it took from March until November to effect McClellan's removal from command? The historical record is clear. The reasons for which McClellan was dismissed in November were the same ones that had prompted Lincoln to remove him from the position of General-In-Chief in March of 1862. And the results were basically the same. Without McClellan's guiding hand firmly gripping military policy the Federal armies in the east were headed to defeat after defeat at the hands of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

Here the thesis of this paper is that McClellan's removal from command was a political decision, based upon political differences regarding war strategy and objectives. The decision was effected by many factors influencing the conflict with the high officials in Washington, which will be examined. The main reason for the timing of the removal from command is shown to be connected to a demand made by General John Pope for an inquiry into the reasons for the Second Manassas defeat. The military consequences of McClellan's removal showed that a suitable replacement was not obtained in generals Burnside or Hooker, who demonstrated time and time again that most of the military difficulties were in the decision making in Washington. That is, without General McClellan's firm and cautious grip on military policy, the Federal armies of the east were hurried into battle against Lee's Army Of Northern Virginia and defeated in bloody confrontations.

McClellan's Military Problem

Here we will review the military situation and investigate the problems it posed. Then we will review the political problem. The military problem can be seen as the following one. In the aftermath of the

¹Richard B. Irwin, *The Removal Of McClellan, Battles and Leaders*, Vol 3, page 102.

great Battle of Antietam, there was no great victory to celebrate. The Army of Northern Virginia had survived to fight again. Because of this there was a political campaign of criticism of McClellan's handling of the battle. This criticism continues today in almost every campaign history of that battle. That criticism is based upon a false notion of the state of the Army of the Potomac. In effect there was no army in a strict sense of an organized military force, well equipped and supplied. The correct way to view it was as a scratch force, cobbled together and pushed out to face Lee's invasion of Maryland, with only supplies already in hand, and without adequate long term logistical support. While we hear much of Lee's ragged Confederates, we hear little of McClellan's ragged and ill supplied Federal soldiers.

The realities of this battle are never actually explained. McClellan's primary command difficulty was how to manage a battle in which the command organization was completely untried and untested. The command structure was entirely new. The primary subordinate commanders, Generals Hooker and Burnside were given new responsibilities. They failed to live up to their roles as leaders in the new army structure. Another difficult problem, which is not usually given the emphasis it deserves, is exactly what kind of experience did the men of the new Army of the Potomac have in fighting battles. The most experienced combat divisions of the old Army of the Potomac had been left to defend Washington. This included the battle tested veterans of the peninsula campaign, such as Hooker's division. The 1st and 12th Corps that engaged Jackson were men from the old Army Of Virginia. Burnside's 9th Corps had not fought before in a major battle. Many of the regiments that were engaged at Antietam were inexperienced recruits, and they performed badly. Hence the battle was fought by McClellan and his subordinate commanders without any real positive battle experience within the new army organization. This fact is obvious in the course of the battle wherein things did not go according to the plan.

Following the battle, McClellan found himself in much the same, if not a worse position, than he had been in in the beginning of 1862. He was in Maryland, far away from Richmond with a depleted and poorly equipped army barely receiving its subsistence supplies through a tenuous line of supply based upon depots in Fredrick and Hagerstown, Maryland. He had no really good military options. This needs to be given emphasis. In September of 1862, the military situation was not much different than it had been in September of 1861. McClellan's Federal army was based on the north side of the Potomac River, and Lee's Confederate army faced him on the south side. In addition there was the problem that McClellan found himself further north and guarding both Washington and the routes of invasion into Maryland and Pennsylvania. His position was definitely worse than in the fall of 1861 although he did have a much larger and more experienced army. The problem he faced was, what to do with his army?

There were no good strategy options available. He could do nothing strategically bold because he was required to keep his army always between the Confederates and Washington. In addition he had to guard against the possibility that Lee would again invade Maryland. In addition, because of the logistical problems, he was tied down to a war of limited maneuver, with its primary object to advance against Lee's army near Winchester. Lee would always have the advantage in knowing the fact that McClellan had to keep part of his force in front of Washington, guarding it. Furthermore, any bold campaign against Richmond faced some big military problems that any experienced army commander had to weigh and ponder carefully. The main one was the problem of supply. Winter was approaching, and an advance into the wilderness that was Northern Virginia, faced the problems of a devastated infrastructure of roads and railroads.

However, McClellan realized that a forward movement was necessary. In anticipation of that he wrote to Halleck and requested the following in a telegram dated September 22nd: "...this army should be re-organized. It is absolutely necessary to secure its efficiency that the old skeleton regiments should be filled up at once, & officers appointed to supply the numerous existing vacancies...I propose as soon as the pontoon bridge can be relaid (it is expected to arrive there today) to cross these troops and occupy Harper's Ferry & Charlestown, with a view of pushing them out into the Shenandoah Valley as soon as practicable." On the 23rd he telegraphed: "As I mentioned to you before our Army has been very much reduced by casualties in the recent battles, and in my judgment all the reinforcements of old troops that can possibly be dispensed with around Washington and other places should be instantly pushed forward by rail to this Army via Harper's Ferry and Hagerstown."

Sometime on the 24th the plans changed. A storm came up and revealed the difficulty in McClellan's Harpers Ferry plan. A more secure river crossing than a pontoon bridge was needed. During the day he changed his mind regarding the sufficiency of the pontoon bridge so he telegraphed a change in plan. "It is necessary to build a permanent double track wagon bridge over the Potomac at Harpers' Ferry--also a wagon bridge over the Shenandoah at the same place on the piers now standing...until this or the rail bridge is finished it is scarcely possible to advance from Harper's Ferry in force, and as that is clearly our true line of operations, I need not urge upon you the necessity of completing our communications there." Hence contrary to what most histories tell us, General McClellan was ready to move forward to engage Lee's army. But the Lincoln administration was not so compliant to McClellan's plan. They, as usual, were alarmed that the proposed movement implied exposing Washington. Halleck replied "I had hoped that, instead of crossing at Harper's Ferry...you would be able to cross lower down the Potomac, so as to cover Washington...It seems to me that Washington is the real base of operations, and that it should not under any circumstances be exposed."

After this we hear more of McClellan's plan to cross at Harper's Ferry and engage Lee near Winchester. But Halleck refused to consent to the building of a bridge at Harper's Ferry and continued to urge a Potomac River crossing further south so that Washington would be covered by the movement. This causes McClellan to write to his wife that Halleck is a perfect idiot. The reason is not hard to find. McClellan believes that Lee's army is concentrated near Winchester. That is in terms of McClellan's strategic thinking, the proper place to engage Lee's army. But it is clear that Halleck doesn't like this plan at all. He urges a crossing south of Harper's Ferry. Clearly anticipating a battle south of Winchester and closer to Washington. Halleck's suggestion had the difficulty that the only place that was suitable was near Point Of Rocks. There was surely no bridge there, but it was provided with access to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. This was probably a good idea, except for just one thing. Lee was sliding his troops westward so as to move into Maryland again should the opportunity arise. Hence crossing at Point Of Rocks was too far east to cover the possible routes into Maryland.

Hence contrary to what most histories relate, General McClellan had planned to move his army from Maryland into Virginia in a limited campaign to secure the region near Harper's Ferry and Winchester. This was a limited strategy designed to secure control of the routes of invasion into Maryland and Pennsylvania. It foresaw the build up of a military infrastructure in the region in anticipation of movement south into the Shenandoah Valley or to the east towards Washington. But Lincoln did not see this as desirable and so the plan was rejected, in favor of a different one, which was the same old, on to Richmond, plan that McClellan had previously rejected.

From McClellan's viewpoint, the plan for a limited campaign and advance into Virginia had some

positive aspects. He would be able to satisfy the demands of Abraham Lincoln that he move south and engage Lee's army. He would also be close to his sources of supply and by transferring his supply base to Harper's Ferry he would have been able to advance far enough to engage Lee in the Shenandoah Valley and perhaps win a victory. But Lincoln, through Halleck, refused to assent to the implementation of this plan. This refusal is rather puzzling, and it needs to be kept in mind in discussion of the following events.

On the 7th of October McClellan was directed to advance by one of two different routes. Apparently the bridge problem had not been resolved. That meant that he was being ordered to advance across the Potomac River without sufficient preparations to supply and maintain the army. According to the returns, the army was 116,000 men available for duty. They were to be pushed forward across the Potomac River without the means to supply them. This seems to have suddenly become the focal point of the military difficulties. Without a well established plan of continuous supply it would not be a good idea to push the men across the river before rectifying all of the supply problems in advance of the movement. This is where things suddenly became difficult. McClellan balked at undertaking the ordered movement, until the supply issues were resolved. When we look at the time line, it is clear that there was a delay from roughly September 22 until October 7 in deciding the operational plan of action. The plan that was arrived at was one in which the army would be required to move with its current supplies in hand. That is to say, no permanent lines of communications would be allowed that could be used to assure the needed supplies for the army.

In his reply to the order of October 7, General McClellan wrote, "I have taken all possible measures to insure the most prompt equipment of the troops, but from all that I can learn it will be at least three days before the 1st, 5th and 6th Corps are in condition to move from their present camps---they need shoes & other indispensable articles of clothing, as well as shelter tents &c. I beg to assure you that not an hour shall be lost in carrying your instructions into effect". In reading the reply, we see that in consulting his Corps commanders on their readiness to move, they informed him that all was not ready."

To compound the concern regarding the supply problem, before the three days were up, Confederate General Stuart solidified any concerns that McClellan had for the security of his supply communications. Stuart repeated his Peninsula exploit by raiding around McClellan's army and returning unmolested to Virginia. It was more of a propaganda victory than an actual military feat. It created a storm of criticism and McClellan hesitated to move forward as directed in the orders of October 7. Stuart's objective had been aimed squarely at McClellan's supply line. His orders were to sever that by burning the railroad bridge at Chambersburg, PA. By a stroke of good luck, the Confederate intelligence had failed to learn that the bridge was made of iron and not wood, as had been assumed. So when the Confederates attempted to burn the railroad bridge, the plan failed. In his report to Halleck McClellan placed the blame on cavalry. "The great difficulty we labor under is the want of Cavalry, as many of our horses are overworked and unserviceable." In addition the supply problem had not been rectified, the needed supplies failed to arrive "...Corps commanders sent their wagons to Hagerstown and Harper's Ferry for it. It did not arrive as promised & has not yet arrived."

The glaring deficiencies in the logistical supply of the Army of the Potomac had now become obvious to McClellan. It was his main concern of the campaign. He wrote to his wife on October 7, summarizing the problem "I cant go far for the reason that I cannot carry many supplies. So far as I can see the little campaign can't last many days for when it is once fought some other line of operations will

have to be taken as the one up here leads to no final result.”

Stuart's raid had one positive benefit if it was McClellan's objective to delay the movement. It ate up much of McClellan's time by focusing attention on the Cavalry problem, while the other supply difficulties were ironed out. On the 13th McClellan wrote a detailed report on the raid. In McClellan's mind the raid had focused attention on one of the great deficiencies of the Army of the Potomac, and so we wrote, “ I therefore again most strenuously urge upon the Dept the imperative necessity of at once supplying this Army including the command of general Banks with a sufficient number of horses to remount every dismounted Cavalry soldier within the shortest possible time.” This is the correct and proper military response to an obvious military problem that had been clearly exposed. But Lincoln didn't see things this way at all. He and generations of historians see this as McClellan making an excuse for his incompetence. The basis for this is Lincoln's snide comment in response “..if the enemy had more occupation south of the river, his cavalry would not be so likely to make raids north of it.” One can only surmise McClellan's reaction to this obviously nasty barb. It is clearly based upon a fallacy in reasoning. Without sufficient cavalry, the raids would become a bigger problem south of the river than the one that had just occurred.

But there was more than just this. After rejecting McClellan's plan for an advance south towards Winchester, and after failing to deliver the needed horses, shoes, and clothing for the men, Lincoln writes an insultingly snide and nasty comment based entirely upon a fallacy. This was clearly an affront to McClellan's pride and he did not let it pass unnoticed.

This incident points to one of the biggest problems regarding Lincoln's leadership. This is his disregard for taking action to solve real problems that his field commanders could not. In this case, McClellan pointed out a deficiency in the army, and Lincoln's answer was a snide remark, putting the blame back upon McClellan. This was characteristic of him. He avoided solving problems that would have aided field army commanders and instead focused on interfering within their proper sphere of actions. Another example of this is his failure to respond to McClellan's constant requests to do something about the shrinkage of the “old regiments”. McClellan had been urging for weeks that the old regiments, depleted by sickness and casualties be filled up with new recruits instead of by forming new regiments. This policy is well known as one of the most ineffective and obvious mistakes of the Civil War. At the Battle of Antietam the policy of providing entirely new regiments from the drafted men revealed the problem. They broke in confusion when attacked, and so were more of a danger than a help. Yet nothing was done about this, despite McClellan's many requests for action that were submitted during this period.

President Lincoln, who clearly did not understand a thing that was happening, and barely had an understanding of military logistics and supply resumed giving him orders regarding how to proceed with the military problem. But as usual they were not really orders, more along the lines of suggestions. To understand the difficulties lets look at the problem. McClellan found himself in Maryland west of and north of Washington, far from Richmond and far from the former supply base at Manassas Junction. McClellan's army was safe where it was, but to put it in motion anywhere south but towards Washington, was a difficult problem. The real problem was as follows. How to put the army in a military profitable position with a minimum of exposure to profitable attack by General Lee.

Lincoln had sent him a letter telling him how to solve this problem. This was not within the bounds of the President to specify the operational plan in detail. The President's job is to clearly define the

military objectives, and the General-In-Chief's job is to define these objectives in terms that make the field commanders job possible. It is the field commanders job to define the strategy of putting his field army in position to achieve the mission objectives. Unfortunately, there were three different objectives, capture Richmond, defend Washington, and prevent Lee from invading Maryland. These were contradictory goals. It was the General-In -Chief's job the resolve these contradictory missions for the field commanders. Halleck failed to do this by permitting Lincoln to give operational directions to the field commander. In addition, and most seriously, Halleck failed to give clear directions regarding how the invasion routes into Maryland were to be secured.

A third mission was created by Lee's invasion of Maryland. This was the mission to guard the invasion routes into Maryland. Despite his repeated attempts to get the Lincoln administration to face this issue, they ignored the problem. McClellan attempted to resolve this issue by making Harper's Ferry into a base to defend the approaches into Maryland and Pennsylvania. This was not fully supported. The problem was only resolved when he requested specific instructions as to his responsibility regarding the security of the invasion routes into Maryland and Pennsylvania. But here Lincoln was defining operational strategy, without knowing anything about what the Confederates were doing. In Lincoln's approach to strategy, the enemy would just passively wait for McClellan to do something and then do the obvious in response.

Lincoln's strategy letter of October 13, 1862 was fairly simple, it was suggested that McClellan advance into Virginia keeping to the east side of the Blue Ridge Mountains, so that the Federal army would be between the Confederates and Washington. There was nothing new, as this was the same strategy that had been previously rejected by McClellan in the winter of 1862. What was different this time was that McClellan acceded to this plan and did what the President desired.

McClellan's Political Problem

In his diary entry for November 8, Colonel Charles S. Wainwright gives us a hint as to why the order for McClellan to be removed from command was issued on November 5. "The reports that Lincoln was only waiting for the New York elections to be over before he again relieved General McClellan have proven to be only too true. Last night he received the order again depriving him of his command, and directing him to turn it over to General Burnside."

In the fall of 1862 the midterm congressional and gubernatorial elections gave the judgment of the people upon the performance of the Lincoln administration. The result was a devastating defeat for the Republican party. This verdict should tell us how successful the Lincoln administration's war policy had been. The clear answer was; not very successful. One difficulty in analyzing the political effects of military policy and vice versa is that the midterm congressional elections did not all occur at the same time as they do today. They were spread out over the fall of 1862 and into the following year. It probably would not be incorrect to say that the political events were very much a consideration in deciding military policy. One aspect of this policy was the change in war aims announced with the Emancipation Proclamation. The elections, if we are to interpret them in a rather obvious way, did not embrace that change in policy. On the other hand, the elections being entirely negative for the Republican party would seem to have demanded a change in military leadership. That is given the political dissatisfaction expressed in the election results, it is an obvious political inference that the problem was not dissatisfaction with the civilian leadership, but with the military leadership, and so some general's heads needed to roll. Obviously this meant the main army generals McClellan in the

east and General Buell in the west.

Probably the most important political issue that McClellan had to deal with was the Emancipation Proclamation. Modern historians don't seem to be well informed on the political opinions of the army. It would seem that the troops themselves were not enthusiastic about the changed war aims. This would put them in agreement with the political opinion of the nation, which gave the Republicans a sharp rebuke at the polls. According to Steven Sears, the opinions of the troops had no significance. But McClellan believed that the Emancipation Proclamation was detrimental to the morale of the men. Hence he resolved to address this problem. But the problem was, what to do in this regard? He consulted with senior officers regarding their opinions in the matter in regards to opposing the position of the Lincoln administration, but in the end he decided to issue a statement which took no position on the political issue, but did state that it was the armies' duty to obey civilian authority. This position gained him no friends. In the end he had decided to support the Lincoln administration by declining a public disagreement on this issue.

Contrary to the prevailing historical opinion, we can see that McClellan's problem was how to resolve the rift in his army over the issue of slavery. It would not be wrong to state that the average soldier didn't give a hoot for freeing any slaves. If we are to believe many reports, the men of the army were mostly racists in the modern sense of that word.² So, to have come out supporting the administration on the issue of the Emancipation Proclamation, despite the opposition within his army, was a bold political move to gain favor with Washington's high officers. But it did him no real good in their eyes or in the eyes of modern historians, who prefer to view things solely from the viewpoint that Lincoln was morally right in everything that he did.

A big thorn in McClellan's side was General Hooker who had been wounded at Antietam. Hooker said to anyone and everyone that “...he could have driven the enemy into the river..” and “He talked a great deal about McClellan not renewing the attack...” Upon his transfer to Washington, Hooker had the ear of the highest officials in Washington. During his recovery he was actively campaigning for McClellan's job. He was frequently visited by Secretary of Treasury Salmon Chase, and told Chase about McClellan's errors and Chase told him “General, if my advice had been followed, you would have commanded after the retreat to James River, if not before.” Hooker was pushing hard for McClellan's job by making his support for Emancipation widely known, “General Hooker declared with great freedom that the Proclamation was issued too late, rather than too early, that the time had fully arrived when it was impossible to prosecute the war vigorously and with a certainty of success without it.” Hooker was fully aiming for McClellan's job.³

According to Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War, the politics of deciding who was to command the Army of the Potomac following McClellan was the main problem in the aftermath of Antietam. “The breach between McClellan and the military authorities in Washington had become too wide to be closed. His removal from the command had been resolved upon, and had been delayed only from the difficulty of deciding upon his successor. The choice lay between Burnside and Hooker.”⁴ Here we see why Salmon Chase had spent so much time interviewing Hooker, but in the end the command went to Burnside.

²David Herbert Donald editor, *Gone For A Soldier the Civil War Memoirs of Private Alfred Bellard*, page 147.

³Walter H. Hebert, *Fighting Joe Hooker*, page 146, and Bruce Catton, *The Army Of the Potomac*, Glory Road, page 3.

⁴Alfred H. Guernsey and Henry M. Alden, *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*, Page 405.

McClellan's Personal Problems

According to a letter to General Joseph Hooker, dated September 20, 1862, McClellan was ill following the Battle Of Antietam. "I have been very sick the last few days, and just able to go where my presence was absolutely necessary..." To his wife he elaborated: "I have been under the weather since the battle-the want of rest & anxiety brought on my old disease" It is probably not unkind to say that he was exhausted from the constant stress of dealing with the Lincoln administration and the administrative tasks of the army, not to mention making the life and death decisions of commanding the greatest battle ever fought on American soil. However, it appears that McClellan had an attack of typhoid fever. On September 23, he wrote to general Halleck "I am too unwell to give due attention to your telegrams yesterday". This is a surprise that he would admit this to his enemies. It must have been the case that he was in a serious condition of debilitation. What he needed was a leave and some rest and relaxation. But these were not privileges that an army commander could afford. For no sooner than the battle was over, the day was won, and the Union saved, than there began a constant stream of recriminations and thankless tasks that demanded his attention. To add to the problems, he received not one kind word of official thanks. No reassurances or messages of support and comfort from the Lincoln administration were forthcoming.⁵

It would appear that Little Mac's sickness, although it did not in the least concern anyone in official Washington, did concern his wife, and she traveled to join him at his headquarters. From reading between the lines of his correspondence, the period of rest and relaxation, which still demanded his official attention, led to McClellan's recovery. But this did not mean that those in Washington were going to let up on him. On October 7, he made an important decision. He telegraphed to Washington his campaign plan. Unfortunately they apparently thought all was ready to start immediately. No! McClellan had not yet developed his plan of campaign, he had merely agreed to its proposed outline. So he was plunged back into the details of army administration.

Modern historians apply the interpretation on this that McClellan's grasping the nettle of army administration was merely another excuse for delay. It would appear that the real reason for the delay from September 18 until October 7 was McClellan's sickness and exhaustion. Once McClellan had resolved upon a plan, it was necessary to work out the administrative details. We have no direct evidence on this but from the way things work in the army it can be inferred that it was not until detail discussions began upon the readiness of the troops and sufficiency of supply that it came to light there were serious problems regarding supply and readiness of the army.

In addition to these very real problems, there was the problem of dealing with that deceitful scoundrel Abraham Lincoln. Normally any man of ambition and self respect would have resigned under protest because of having to work under that incompetent personage. During his visit in early October Lincoln had continued to lie to McClellan. This was a resumption of his lies that he had been feeding McClellan for months. He intimated that McClellan would be confirmed as army commander, just as had been promised before the Army of the Potomac was transferred to General John Pope. Lincoln was a very accomplished liar and he certainly deceived McClellan as to his real intentions regarding the future of the army.

It is a wonder that McClellan took Lincoln's abuse. When McClellan set out on his Peninsula campaign

⁵Steven Sears editor, The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan, Chapter Nine.

he was demoted from being General-in-Chief behind his back in an insulting uncouth manner. Obviously designed to anger him into resigning. Then his campaign plan was blown up by deliberate interference in refusing to send the First Corps to the Peninsula, when the plan critically depended upon them for success. Then the support of the Navy was withdrawn, insuring a long siege operation. This then was followed up by a constant stream of insulting messages asking why the operation was taking so long. It was taking so long because the high officials in Washington were strangling it by withholding the needed manpower and resources to properly do the job. One wonders why McClellan did not succumb to the pressure and simply give up and resign as Lincoln demanded? At a critical point of the Peninsula campaign Lincoln actually tells McClellan to “give up the job.”⁶ The answer is that McClellan knew that this was what the high officials in Washington wanted and he wasn’t going to give them that. They would have to fire him, and suffer the political consequences.

It is remarkable, in view of the shabby treatment of him by Lincoln, that he didn't lose his temper more often than he did. There was the time when during the siege of Yorktown, Lincoln sent a nasty telegram, saying that “Your call for Parrot guns implies infinite procrastination”. The delay had been Lincoln's fault. There was the incident following the Battle of Gaines's Mill when McClellan wrote to Lincoln, in rather obvious frustration and anger “You have done your best to sacrifice this army”. The strategy was Lincoln's and the orders came from him. Then after the Battle of Antietam, there were no kind words or expressions of thanks, McClellan was angered. In a final effort, Lincoln sent a nasty message after Stuart's Chambersburg raid. That implied that McClellan was at fault because he had not moved his army south into Virginia. But it was Lincoln who had refused him permission to do that. This provoked a response and produced a heated exchange. So Lincoln was still playing the nasty game of recrimination and blame in trying to provoke McClellan into resignation.

Stuart's Chambersburg Cavalry Raid Around McClellan

On October 10 General J.E.B. Stuart crossed the Potomac River in a raid into Maryland and Pennsylvania. The confederate force consisted of 1800 men and four guns. To oppose this raid there were only 800 men in the cavalry of the Army of the Potomac. Above all, the raid brought home to General McClellan the deficiency in the cavalry arm of his army. He set out energetically to resolve this problem and that was probably a mistake, in that it greatly irritated President Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln apparently saw the raid as a great deficiency of McClellan's generalship. This seems to have been a problem that was to dog him throughout the war. He would often blame others for the great deficiencies of his leadership, by putting the blame for his failures upon others. In particular, his favorite scapegoat was General McClellan.

Although the direct military effects of the raid were insignificant, Stuart failed to destroy the railroad bridge at Chambersburg, which was his main mission, it did result in a lot of fear in Pennsylvania and political pressure on Lincoln and Halleck to do something. They did nothing. There were two main outcomes of this raid. The first one was that McClellan demanded that the deficiencies of the cavalry arm of his army be corrected. This apparently was successful as the performance of that arm improved dramatically in the succeeding campaigns of the Army of the Potomac. The other effect was that Lincoln took a negative view of McClellan's attempts to rectify this particular problem.

Characteristically Lincoln's response to McClellan's requests that the deficiencies of the cavalry arm of

⁶Ibid, page 276. See McClellan's letter to his wife on page 275 for how he felt about Lincoln's remark.

his army be corrected, deficiencies that eventually led to significant reforms resulting in significant improvements in the efficiency of that organization, was a snide and caustic remark revealing his mean spirited character: "Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigue anything?"⁷ Historians think this is a cute answer, but it reveals a caustic bitterness towards criticism of his administration.⁸ But here the criticism was not directly stated or implied, it was just evident in the facts of General McClellan's reports and consequent requests that the problems be rectified by sending horses to properly mount his cavalry arm. The facts were that the cavalry simply did not have the horses needed to properly do their duty. But despite what Lincoln thought, the cavalry were doing their duty and it was hard times for them as they were in constant action as can be seen from consulting the regimental histories.

In addition the cavalry were not profitably armed. It was not until some days after the raid, that the penny pinching Lincoln administration, issued carbines to the men of the 6th US cavalry. This improvement in their armament would have a decided effect of the subsequent movements of McClellan's army. However, despite McClellan's best efforts to get horses for his cavalry arm, the 6th US had to leave behind its company C and 300 dismounted men at the beginning of McClellan's advance into Virginia⁹.

In closing this section, most histories neglect to point out the fighting done by the cavalry in McClellan's so called "tardy" movement. The regimental histories reveal they had hard duty and fought in some severe and some notable engagements. The main military result of Stuart's Chambersburg raid should therefore be seen as exposing the tenuous nature of McClellan's communications, or his logistical supply line. Stuart's mission had been to cripple the supply line to McClellan's army by burning the railroad bridge over which McClellan's army received its supplies. Thinking the bridge was made of wood saved that army from a severe supply embarrassment, as Stuart failed in his mission. But the raid pointed out the inefficiency of the cavalry arm and pointed out that a successful raid could severely cripple the army in the midst of a campaign far from its base of supplies.

McClellan's Logistical Supply Problems

"Without going into details, and without attempting to pass judgment, it must be said that no candid person, knowing anything of war and armies, can doubt that the Army of the Potomac, in the last days of September and early October, 1862, needed nearly everything before beginning a fresh campaign of its own choice. For some things such as shoes, the troops were really suffering. It is equally evident that the duty of providing these essential supplies rested with the administrative services in Washington; and that some of the supplies did not reach the troops for a long time..."¹⁰ despite this very evident and indisputable fact, typical histories of the war continue to give credit to the myth that the supply problems were an invention to justify McClellan's failure to promptly advance against Lee's army.

In early October President Lincoln visited the army and these things were explained to him. He apparently did not see the lack of shoes, and the state of the poor equipment, for he clearly did not

⁷Steven Sears editor, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, page 509.

⁸There was an epidemic of sickness in the cavalry and artillery horses in the army at this time which reduced the number of serviceable horses. See Pleasanton's report November 17, 1862.

⁹W.H. Carer, *From Yorktown to Santiago With The Sixth U.S. Cavalry*, Page 61, see also Pleasanton's report page 66.

¹⁰Richard B. Irwin, *The Removal Of McClellan, Battles and Leaders*, Vol 3, page 102.

believe McClellan's explanation for the need to re-equip the army. Because upon his return to Washington, he ordered the army to advance. This is very strange because on September 26 Charles Wainwright wrote: "There is said to be a good deal of suffering among our men for want of clothing, especially blankets and shoes. The losses in the Pope affair have not been made good yet. Many of the men are quite barefooted, and others without a blanket. The necessary requisitions for them have been made, but none have yet been received. As for horseshoes, I doubt if one is to be had in the army."¹¹

Lincoln's thinking was if the rebels fight with men in ragged clothes and no shoes, then why shouldn't his army do the same? Of course, the lack of shoes was the main reason for the lack of manpower in Lee's army at Antietam. That nearly caused disaster for the Confederate cause. Did Lincoln think this was a good thing? In the final analysis one has to conclude that Lincoln simply had no kind thought for the men in his armies, he was willing to send them into battle ill equipped and poorly clothed and shod, even though it was in his power to rectify that.

On the 30th of September Charles Wainwright, who was now promoted to Corps Chief of Artillery, reports: "I did not expect we should remain here so long as this, doing nothing. But they say that our supplies do not come; my batteries, I know, have not received the first thing either from the ordinance or the quartermasters department...This corps has now been two months since receiving any supplies to speak of, and I suppose it is the same throughout the army."

At the review of the army by President Lincoln on October 3, 1862, Charles Wainwright summed up Lincoln's attitude towards the army. "He rode along the lines taking little notice of the troops, and half the time not even looking at them. Not a word of approval, not a smile...I got back to camp...utterly disgusted...There was not the slightest enthusiasm on the part of the men; and how could there be for a President who did not show the smallest interest in them?"

Lincoln's Final Solution

A careful examination of the facts shows that the Lincoln administration had been planning since the spring of 1862 to remove McClellan. The plan as it developed was to establish a new field army, called the Army of Virginia, in Northern Virginia. This army was created by withholding troops from McClellan's Army of the Potomac, then engaged in the Peninsula Campaign. This withholding of manpower at critically needed times was the first of many efforts to undermine McClellan's Peninsula campaign plans.

In June General John Pope was brought over from the west to take command of the new main field army that was being created. Then later General Halleck was brought in from the west and made General-In-Chief in order to provide a cover for the decision to combine McClellan's Army of the Potomac into the Army of Virginia under the command of General Pope. As the plan developed in its implementation, McClellan was left without an active command following the retreat from the Peninsula. General Pope's bungling failure in command of the Army of Virginia provided the opportunity for McClellan to recover his army during the crisis that followed in the wake of the Second Manassas debacle, and Lee's invasion of Maryland. Despite the opposition of his cabinet, who urged that McClellan be sacked as a traitor, Lincoln gave McClellan the command of the defenses of Washington. This move in effect was an admission that his plan to replace McClellan with Pope had

¹¹Allen Nevins, A Diary Of Battle.

failed. McClellan was unofficially restored to command.

McClellan responded with energy and forced Lee out of Maryland. McClellan's claim of victory in the Battle of Antietam provided the political justification for Lincoln to proclaim his new war policy in the Emancipation Proclamation. Despite this, McClellan received no thanks from Lincoln. Following Antietam, McClellan proposed a plan to advance into Northern Virginia and engage Lee near Winchester. That plan was opposed by Halleck, who failed to understand that any advance into Virginia had to be based upon first securing the Winchester-Harper's Ferry region that would block the invasion route into Maryland and Pennsylvania. This began a resumption of the strategy disputes that had characterized the winter of 1862.

It seems clear that McClellan attempted to conform to the rules set down for his behavior by Lincoln. But Lincoln did not reform his bad habit of talking down to and treating McClellan in an insulting and mean manner. This resumption of his old habits did not bode well for the cooperation between the two men. Unfortunately it is clear from the events that it was going to be impossible for McClellan to work with the Lincoln administration despite all of his attempts to conform to their wishes. Lincoln continued with his insulting and demeaning snide comments and failed to take any responsibility for decisions. He made suggestions that were not really suggestions, but instead orders. He failed to see the logistical supply problems and this became a focus of contention.

From McClellan's viewpoint his first responsibility was to secure the states of Maryland and Pennsylvania from Confederate depredations. This led him to think that maneuvering Lee out of Winchester and properly securing this area for the Union was the proper course of action. Evidently Lincoln could care less about this problem. He reverted to the old "On to Richmond" policy by the cumbersome overland route. This route presented severe supply difficulties for a large army. Necessarily McClellan thought the proper military approach was to see that his army was properly and fully equipped before making the movement as supply during the movement could not be guaranteed. Of course Lincoln saw this as an extemporization or expression of further delay. Indeed it was a deliberate attempt to delay things, but if one thinks about the problem, it was better to delay the advance than to move forward the ragged men into the wilderness of Northern Virginia without shoes and proper winter clothing and shelter. Lincoln seemed unconcerned about this and this lack of concern for the proper equipping of the men of the army should give the reader reason to believe that Lincoln's motives were disingenuous.

It is an indisputable fact that Lincoln had thwarted McClellan's role as army commander since the early days of the Peninsula campaign. Then he had interfered by withholding the vital First Corps from the flanking movement that was vital to McClellan's plan. This forced a change in plans into a protracted siege, during which Lincoln sent nasty messages urging McClellan to order ill advised attacks against strongly entrenched Confederate positions. Later at a vital moment in the Peninsula Campaign, he withheld the First Corps again and ordered McClellan to extend his right in a dangerous way, which invited Lee's Seven Days attack. Then Lincoln made probably the greatest strategy blunder of the war by ordering McClellan to retreat from Richmond, a mistake that led to the debacle at Second Manassas, and Lee's invasion into Maryland. Finally, on the eve of battle when victory was assured, Lincoln relieved McClellan from the command of the army.

There is clearly a pattern here. One that indicates that the problem is not with regard to McClellan's failures, it is a pattern that reveals that Lincoln's purpose is to prevent McClellan from achieving any

significant military success. The reason is not hard to find. McClellan being a Democrat could not be allowed to win the war, as that would lead to the overthrow of the Radical Republican agenda if he should become President. So Lincoln's final solution was not to relieve McClellan for his failures, it was because he could not risk that McClellan would be successful. Removing him from command permanently assured that he would never become a heroic general who saved the Union and became President.

Historians Theories About McClellan's Dismissal

The puzzle of McClellan's removal is not that he was dismissed, it is why it occurred at the time that it did, November 7, 1862? Given that Lincoln had been seeking to replace McClellan since the spring, why did he act on November 7, 1862, rather than on some previous date? Furthermore, given the military situation, with the Army of the Potomac poised to take advantage of a situation wherein McClellan's army of 145,000 faced Longstreet's isolated 32,000 men, victory would seem assured. At long last Lincoln's exhortations for McClellan to "strike a blow" and "you must act", were to be realized in the culmination of a long desired great battle with the enemy. But it was not to be, as Lincoln removed McClellan from the command and the new army commander General Burnside decided against a great battle.

There are various theories that one can find regarding the timing of McClellan's relief from command of the Army Of the Potomac. One theory is that McClellan's tardy movement in crossing the Potomac River into Virginia made Lincoln angry. "When , however, the union commander took ten days to move the comparatively short distance of less than fifty miles, Lincoln's temper exploded and McClellan was summarily removed to make way for another commander who just might have the intestinal fortitude to give the Army of the Potomac the kind of battle leadership it deserved."¹² Another is that Stuart's Chambersburg Raid, and McClellan's fumbling failure to stop Stuart was the reason. "Stuarts ride around the Army of the Potomac, had long lasting effects. It helped persuade Lincoln that McClellan was not, nor would ever be, the man to run the enemies of the Union to earth"¹³ Another thesis suggested by Curt Anders is that the heated exchange of telegrams between Lincoln and McClellan following Lincoln's snide and insulting remark about cavalry was the reason. Another reason he suggests is Stanton's formal investigation into the logistical supply allegations attributed by McClellan led to his removal from command.¹⁴ Bruce Catton says that McClellan was dismissed when he was was because, "Lincoln appears to have made up his mind that he would remove him if he let Lee get east of the blue ridge and stand in his path to Richmond..."¹⁵ The most popular one seems to be the rather vague assertion that McClellan was dismissed because he was slow to follow Lee into Virginia despite Lincoln's repeated efforts to get him to move.

The basic problem with all of these is the fact that we have no first hand statement regarding the reason, and so historians are invited to speculate on it. One can make the following observations. The timing was unfortunate and there does not seem to be a specific trigger event other than the fact that the elections scheduled for November 4, 1862 were over. The most reasonable hypothesis is the one that McClellan failed to move with celerity in pursuit of Lee's army after Antietam. This hypothesis has the difficulty that from the facts, this problem rightly belongs with Lincoln, Stanton, and Halleck.

¹²Edward J. Stackpole, *The Fredricksburg Campaign*, The Stackpole Press, Page 52.

¹³Edward J. Longacre, *General John Buford: A Military Biography*, Page 118.

¹⁴Curt Anders, *Henry Wager Halleck*,

¹⁵Bruce Catton, *Mr. Lincoln's Army*, Doubleday, Page 327.

Following their usual mode of operation, they refused to give approval to McClellan's proposal for a limited campaign towards Winchester that could be successfully completed before winter. They then forced him into a protracted "on to Richmond" campaign, with no immediate objectives, and likely to become bogged down in supply problems and eventually based in some unfortunate and poorly selected winter quarters. They failed to provide the required supplies at the start of this campaign, an alarming omission, which indicated the kind of problems likely to follow during the winter. It seems from the facts that the inefficiency of General Miess and general Haupt were clearly to blame.

In the final analysis, it is pretty obvious to an impartial observer that the relationship between Lincoln and McClellan was one poisoned by distrust. President Lincoln failed in his job to inspire confidence and trust in his subordinate general in order to get the best efforts he possibly could. As a leader, this problem applied to many of Lincoln's Generals. Were they all incompetent, or did the problem belong to Lincoln? This writer thinks the problems were with Lincoln as they did not cease after McClellan's removal from command. Although most historians put the blame on McClellan, it is difficult to avoid the fact that Lincoln's snide and nasty telegrams to his subordinate were completely unnecessary and undignified. Lincoln's demeaning attitude toward McClellan was a barrier that could not be overcome.

On November 5, 1862 Lincoln issued an order to remove McClellan from the command of The Army of the Potomac. This action, clearly had to be motivated by his recognition that the relationship with General McClellan was poisoned beyond repair. There was so much suspicion that Lincoln took steps to insure that his orders were carried out. In certain respects he had done McClellan a favor by relieving him of a responsibility that he could not continue to bear.

The problem for a military historian is the following one. Why did Lincoln remove McClellan at a time when the Army of the Potomac was poised to fight Lee's army in a battle, in which the odds of success were higher than ever before? The answer may be the following one. If McClellan should win a great victory, then Lincoln might not be able to ever again remove him, or even worse, if the battle was such a victory that the war was ended, then McClellan was certain to be elected President in the next election. Hence we are left with a bold conclusion. The general who would not fight, the timid overly cautious general of our history books had to be removed from command on the eve of a great battle, not because he might lose, but because he might achieve a great victory and end the war. Thereby bringing an end to the Lincoln administration and the reign of power of the radical Republican party. So Lincoln's action on the eve of the battle, put an end to that problem. A general can not win a great victory and become president if he is not allowed to fight. Lincoln's final solution put an end to that possibility.

General Pope's Blackmail¹⁶

The preceding paragraph has developed the thesis that there is no clear historical conclusion regarding the reason for McClellan being dismissed on November 7, 1862 rather than at a later or earlier time. Here we will introduce a theory that has the benefit that it gives a reason why McClellan was relieved of command on November 7, 1862. The time line can be tied to a particular chain of events, and the reason is compelling. In conjunction with the other reasons for removing McClellan, the particular event of General Pope's demand for justice becomes a compelling reason for McClellan's removal. The thesis is that General Pope blackmailed General Halleck into having McClellan removed because of a

¹⁶Isaac W. Heysinger, *Antietam and the Maryland Campaigns of 1862*, Chapter XXXI.

false dispatch made by General Halleck in which he lied about certain facts which Pope could prove to have been false inventions.

The reason for General Pope's demand that McClellan be removed from command is Pope's erroneous belief that he was back stabbed by General McClellan and his supporters. Pope believed that the men in the Army of the Potomac deliberately caused his defeat at the Battle of Second Manassas and Pope was seeking revenge. Specifically against General's McClellan, Fitz-John Porter and Griffin¹⁷. The fact that Lincoln's order specifically directs that both McClellan and Fitz-John Porter be removed from their positions of command indicates a casual connection to Pope's demands for justice. Alternative theories have the difficulty that they do not address why the order to remove McClellan included the removal of Fitz-John Porter as well.

To understand Pope's allegations, it is necessary to review the Second Manassas campaign. Lincoln decided to remove McClellan from the vicinity of Richmond in order to combine the Army of the Potomac into the Army of Virginia. This was a strategic blunder. Lee took advantage of the move to attack the Army of Virginia before it could be reinforced by McClellan. Pope blamed McClellan for his defeat. Historians blame McClellan for moving slowly, but there is no evidence for that claim, as administrative confusion caused delays in the movement. Despite this, two corps of the Army of the Potomac were on the battle field at Manassas and Pope's men outnumbered Lee by a wide margin. Porter was ordered by Pope to make an attack on Jackson's flank when he was not close to Jackson's flank. This summarizes the confusion. Pope thought Porter was in a position to attack Jackson when he was not. In fact had he attempted to do so, he would have been destroyed by Longstreet. Pope accused Porter of deliberately disobeying the order to attack, and so wanted Porter court marshaled for his betrayal.

Following the disaster, McClellan was placed in command of the defenses of Washington. When Lee invaded Maryland, McClellan was verbally given the job of repelling that invasion by Lincoln, although there were no written orders, directions, or official records to that effect. Pope was removed, the Army of Virginia ceased to exist, and it became part of the Army of the Potomac under McClellan. Pope was understandably angry with Halleck who, although he and tried to keep McClellan from the command, had failed to do so. Halleck had certified to Secretary Stanton that McClellan had been slow to reinforce Pope and so he was to blame for the defeat. Stanton tried to remove McClellan but failed to do so. Hence Pope believed that he had been unfairly blamed for the failure of Second Manassas, after which he had been banished to fight Indians. Pope refused to accept this and fought back by demanding in letters to Halleck that McClellan and Porter be punished for their perfidy.

On September 30, 1862 Pope wrote to Halleck and demanded justice.¹⁸ Since it was Lincoln and not Halleck who had placed McClellan in command following Lee's invasion of Maryland, the letter should be read as addressed to Lincoln. The letter demands an inquiry into the campaign with a view to restoring Pope's military reputation. The facts of the case are that the blame for the debacle lies with Lincoln's blunder in removing McClellan from the Peninsula. A blunder that was confirmed by Halleck in bowing to Lincoln's wishes. It is difficult to see how an inquiry would be favorable to Pope, without

¹⁷It is believed that General Griffin misunderstood his orders in the confusion and marched in the wrong direction to the battle. Pope apparently believed the mistake was intentional. The charges against Griffin were dropped.

¹⁸For the sequence of letters between Pope and Halleck

see:<http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=moawar&cc=moawar&idno=waro0018&node=waro0018%3A2&view=image&seq=818&size=100>

being damaging to both Lincoln and Halleck, since they were to blame. Halleck for his administrative fumbling and Lincoln for his strategic blunder.¹⁹ The idea was simply impractical, and Lee as an enterprising opponent took full advantage of the mistake and clobbered his opponents; punishing them severely for their blundering.

Halleck replied to Pope in a letter dated October 10. Halleck summarizes Pope's letter by saying: "I very much regret the spirit manifested in it and the threatening tone assumed in it towards me." The letter failed to satisfy, and Pope repeated his demands again in a letter dated October 20. In this letter Pope reveals that he completely misunderstands the reasons for the Second Manassas debacle. His thesis is that McClellan and his cabal are to be blamed. "He is under grave charges of neglect and abandonment of the Army Of Virginia." While it is true that Pope commanded incompetently,²⁰ it is probably not true that his mistakes were the total cause of the debacle. That blame lies squarely with Lincoln for ordering the retreat from Richmond in the first place, and approving of the scheme to absorb McClellan's army into that of Pope. While Halleck was also to blame for a very bad military plan in his directions to Pope and McClellan, as well as a poor administrative job in handling the logistics of the movement poorly.

Halleck did not reply to the letter of October 20, and so Pope sent another letter dated October 30, and because of this date it is connected to president Lincoln's order to remove both McClellan and Fitz-John Porter dated November 5²¹. But Halleck says the day it is received by him is November 7. So it is more likely that the October 20 letter had its effect in the removal of McClellan and Porter in the order signed November 5. However, we do notice that Halleck's order to remove McClellan is dated on the same day that his reply to Pope is written, that is November 7. We also note that in the removal order, the timing of the removal is optional. "The General-in-Chief is authorized, in [his] discretion, to issue an order substantially as the above, forthwith or as soon as he may deem proper." What is striking here is the timing of the order is optional. Why is this? In any event Halleck waits only two days and when the letter from Pope arrives he issues the order to remove McClellan immediately and then the order to remove Porter follows several days later. This is also a mystery, why did he wait to dismiss Porter?

One can conclude that the tone of Pope's letter of October 20, made a clear impression, for its primary claim is that "I have been most unfairly and unjustly treated." It is also clear that McClellan is as much a victim as was Pope. Hence it would seem that no good could come from this controversy and that a logical course of action would be to remove what was perceived to be the most offensive of Pope's irritations. That being that McClellan had been unjustly given the command and that Porter was not

¹⁹It is difficult to see how the retreat from Harrison's Landing could have been accomplished without disaster to either McClellan or Pope. McClellan apparently assumed that the retreat would be accomplished by water, based on Halleck's instructions that he was to assume control of all water transports in his region. But there were not enough transports to do the job, so McClellan assumed Halleck would find additional ones. But when the needed transports failed to appear McClellan was forced to retreat overland. By this time Lee had moved to attack Pope and so McClellan escaped without harm from the Confederates. There were supply bottlenecks at Aquia Creek and Alexandria and although the troops arrived the artillery lacked horses and ammunition.

²⁰At a crucial point in the battle, messengers were sent to General Pope that reported Longstreet's command was massing in formation on the left of the Army of Virginia. Pope is supposed to have replied to these messages that it was Porter's troops that they had mistaken for the confederates. No clearer evidence can be found that shows that Pope completely misunderstood Porter's location during the battle.

²¹Isaac W. Heysinger, *Ibid*, page 293. It is unlikely that the October 30 letter provoked Lincoln to remove McClellan and more likely the October 20 letter was the reason.

being properly punished. So it had to be that McClellan was removed and Porter tried in a court marshal.

We have here in this exchange of letters a focal point for the removal of McClellan. This is a reason that is clear and timely to the events in the time line. McClellan was removed primarily as the result of Pope's actions in demanding justice through an inquiry into the Second Manassas debacle. This was an inquiry that neither Halleck or Lincoln wanted. Hence it is logical to suppose that removing McClellan and Porter would cool Pope's demands for action.

The Fredricksburg Debacle and More Until The End

To make the story complete, one has to ask, what happened after McClellan was removed? If the incompetence was his responsibility one would expect an immediate dramatic improvement? In fact the result was a disaster at the Battle of Fredricksburg. The historians have of course not made the inference from that result that there was not something wrong with the generals, that the problem was quite properly in the Washington leadership. What is sad and tragic is that Burnside, who was a Democrat, did what Lincoln had always urged McClellan to do. That is "strike a blow". Burnside showed that he was not timid and he was not afraid of Lee. He struck that blow, and received more than a bloody nose. It was a terrible horrid bloody mess of a battle failure. Burnside was blamed for the debacle.

Burnside was replaced by Hooker. The result was another devastating defeat at Chancellorsville. As usual the blame was placed upon Hooker's head. Here was the general who was completely the opposite of McClellan. Fighting Joe was his name. He failed at Chancellorsville. Then came Meade who won a defensive battle at Gettysburg, but failed to do much at all after that. He was timid like McClellan. Finally we get get, a general who was the perfection of Lincoln's dream. A compliant western Republican general. Grant fully earned the nickname "Butcher Grant" by forging ahead, racking up pointless casualties until he got the idea of attacking Richmond from the south. Basically from the same place as McClellan had been directed to retreat from in the summer of 1862. But now it was 1864. Grant eventually won after a long siege campaign, but he never received the criticism for it that McClellan had, because he was busy ordering attacks on entrenched positions that failed time and time again. There was a big butchers bill, but Grant had delivered the victory and so he became President, because he was a Republican.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has taken a different perspective upon the events that led up to the removal of General McClellan from the command of the Army of the Potomac. This is a perspective that addresses the military problems and issues. From this viewpoint, we see that the problems lie mostly with the high officials in Washington. Most histories tend to take the opposite position in that they try to justify the inept and inefficient Washington administration and put the blame for failure upon McClellan's head. That this problem did not end with McClellan's removal, but instead persisted, should be reason to question the modern accounts.

It is evident that President Lincoln failed to understand the slightest aspect of logistics and supply and had only a rudimentary understanding of strategy. In making this assertion, it must be understood that it was Lincoln and not Halleck that made the military decisions with respect to the Army of the Potomac.

Lincoln failed to understand the strategic problem of guarding against a resumed invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania. This failure is evident in the fact that within nine months of Antietam, Lee invaded these states a second time. There had been no steps taken to prevent this.

Lincoln's interference in the military plans of General McClellan is the most obvious of the problems that surrounded their troubled relationship. It is fair to say that Lincoln understood nothing of what McClellan was trying to do with his army. This is most clearly evident, when on the verge of a great victory over Longstreet's wing of Lee's army, Lincoln removed McClellan from command on the eve of battle. We are left wondering what was Lincoln thinking? This was one of the great mysteries of the war, it was, beyond any doubt, one of the most significant of the lost opportunities.

The only theory that makes sense in light of the facts, is that pressure from General Pope that his reputation be restored to him, through an inquiry into the Second Manassas debacle, was the reason for McClellan's removal. Occurring as it did on the verge of a great union military victory is, however, difficult to reconcile.

From a military perspective, it is difficult to find anything positive in Lincoln's leadership. He was incapable of understanding strategy, he didn't appreciate the problems of supply and logistics, he didn't understand the need for soldiers to be trained and properly led by men of integrity and professionalism, and he didn't understand how to treat his subordinates with honesty and respect. It is this last factor of honesty and respect that Lincoln lacked in his relationship with General McClellan. It was Lincoln's dishonesty and his lack of respect that poisoned the relationship between the two men. Coupled with his military ignorance, this was a significant problem of leadership that Lincoln could not rise above. His only option to resolve the difficulty was to remove McClellan from the command of the army.

Most histories blame McClellan. But it is clear that McClellan was not really the problem. Lincoln's caustic attitude revealed by his offhand disparaging comments, such as, regarding the Army of the Potomac "...it is only McClellan's bodyguard"²², would have been the cause of a severe upbraiding in the case of a junior official. But who was there to upbraid Lincoln?

The final proof that it is Lincoln and not McClellan that is the problem is to be found in the performance of the army in the years following McClellan's removal. The performance of the army did not improve. Defeat followed defeat, and it was only the slow and steady drain of dead and dispirited men upon the Army of Northern Virginia that led to the final victory.

²²Steven Sears, George B. McClellan the Young Napoleon, page 331.